MY Sergeants

By CPT Max R. Blumenfeld

Time and time again, we've heard that good NCOs are where "the rubber meets the road." In my journey through the Army's rank structure, NCOs have been my guideposts on the road to growth, development and achievement. I call them "my" sergeants because they're NCOs who have made a difference in my life.

In 1977, the recent concept of the "all-volunteer Army" was being actively promoted in American society. The days of the draft were now past. The Women's Army Corps (WAC) still existed; male and female soldiers were segregated during training. Gender-integrated training didn't begin until later that year. In earlier days, the threat of an Article 15 lingered if you were caught even speaking to a WAC during training. The horizontal ladder and the run-dodge-and-jump were PT test events done in boots and uniform. The specialist (E-4) was rated by periodic Enlisted Evaluation Reports and there were always some NCOs who struck terror in the hearts of younger soldiers, demanding scores of pushups from the hapless trainees, including me — a 17-year-old French immigrant who left his family, language and culture to become an American soldier.

He was an NCO to remember. From below his drill sergeant hat, his eyes pierced right through me. It wasn't his rugged facial features and silver hair that I remember, but rather, what Drill Sergeant Desouza taught me at Ft. Jackson, SC.

The first time we had a Class B inspection, decked out in the khaki uniforms of those days, we were impressed and mesmerized by the rows upon rows of ribbons that adorned his chest. He was a Vietnam veteran and during the inspection, it was hard not to squint as the bright sun reflected upon his highly-polished Combat Expert Infantryman's Badge and Airborne wings.

Desouza represented the very best of what it meant to be a soldier for a half-scared, insecure "Frenchie." To him, I was probably just another recruit primed for "remedial training in character building." When the platoon placed second in the company-wide drill and ceremonies competition, I inadvertently

> I asked SFC Roberts, "How will I know if I'm a good officer?" He said, '"Lieutenant, if you ever get to combat and get shot, you'll know you're a good officer if your men come back to get your butt out of there.'"

overheard a conversation SFC Desouza was having with one of his colleagues.

"I'm proud of them," Desouza told the other drill sergeant. "They did a helluva job...but they would have been first had I trained them more."

From that simple statement, I realized he assumed complete responsibility for all his soldiers did or failed to do. He took the responsibility for training in a personal way and did not look for excuses. The burden of training was his and his alone.

My first duty assignment was at Cambrai-Fritsch Kaserne in Darmstadt, Germany, with HHB, 32nd Army Air Defense Command; the U.S. "nuclear umbrella" for NATO forces during the Cold War.

OD permanent press fatigues were now system-wide, quarter-ton jeeps were the primary military vehicles, every soldier was required to have in his or her possession the SMLM (Soviet Military Liaison Mission, pronounced "smell 'em") card and one of the top contemporary hits was "We Are Family" by Sister Sledge. Enter SFC Charles E. Huller, my first section sergeant.

"BE, KNOW, DO" is not a revolutionary concept that appeared like a "big bang" for military leadership. It was inspired by NCOs like SFC Huller.

Huller was a mentor for this 18-year-old, heavily-accented and sometimes confused soldier. Huller knew how to be a supervisor, an NCO and someone who could be trusted with your thoughts and concerns. He **listened** and made it a point to know his soldiers as individuals. Despite the fact that he had a home life of his own, he treated his soldiers as an extension of his own family. His wife was as committed to the soldiers as he was. Her contributions ranged from baking a cake for someone's birthday to being wholeheartedly active in company functions such as dances or parties.

SFC Huller saw something in me that I didn't even know existed. He recommended me for attendance at the 7th Army NCO Academy in Bad Tbelz. Although he couldn't make it to my graduation, he was there when I returned to the barracks late in the evening to be the first one to congratulate me on my achievement. I'll never forget the genuine pride that gleamed in his eyes when he shook my hand.

When I later left Active duty at Ft. Campbell, KY, I attended college where I received a commission through the ROTC program at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, TN. As an armor officer in the Tennessee Army National Guard, I was now on "the other side of the fence." Yet, every time I prepared my Class A uniform, my NCO Professional Development Ribbon reminded me of my earlier days and some of the lessons I'd learned.

As an officer, soldiers now looked to me for decisions and guidance. I knew NCOs made it happen, but there was more to it than just that trite phrase. "An armor officer," a maintenance sergeant once advised me, "has to get his hands dirty, but not his fingernails."

One of my first objectives was to get to know "my" sergeant as a person and as a professional. SFC Frank Roberts and I exchanged ideas and kept in constant communication. Although the ultimate responsibility of all that happened (or failed to happen) was mine, we became like a unified "tag team." ▶

Roberts was a strong man both physically and in life's experiences. On his left sleeve, he wore the 1st Cav Div patch. He was a Vietnam veteran who'd been baptized in battle. As an experienced armor crewman, he made it his duty to know everything about the M-48 and M-60A1 main battle tanks. More importantly, he conveyed this great wealth of knowledge and experience in a classroom or during an FTX so everyone (including myself) could understand and learn.

He guided me through my first real troop situations so I could earn the trust and respect of my soldiers. During one of our frequent discussions on training or maintenance, I asked, "How will I know if I'm a good officer?"

Roberts paused for a second, took another sip of coffee, then with an intense look in his eyes, said, "Lieutenant, if you ever get to combat and get shot, you'll know you're a good officer if your men come back to get your butt out of there."

Since then, I've thought about officer evaluations, awards and decorations and all the "stuff" that makes a successful officer career. I sometimes wonder about their realistic value if soldiers don't believe in their leaders. Roberts is a good measuring tool for my own evaluation of what I'm doing, how I'm doing it and how it will affect each and every soldier I'm responsible for.

The NCOs I've known were unique because they didn't just go through the motions. They put their heart, mind and spirit into what they were doing. Theirs was never an eight-to-five job. It was "Mission First, Troops Always."

As a captain, I appreciate and respect the importance of "NCO business" because I have been the recipient of its positive effect. I encourage "sergeant's time" as a way for my NCOs to spend quality time with younger soldiers.

Where are the NCOs of my earlier days? I don't know. But I'll never forget how they really were where "the rubber meets the road" during my years of military service. ■

Blumenfeld was the radio/TV broadcast officer with the 118th Public Affairs Detachment, Tennessee Army National Guard, when he wrote this article.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation
(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Publication Title: THE NCO JOURNAL
2. Publication No.: 9 0 7 - [illegible] 2 7
3. Filing Date: 27 SEP 95
4. Issue Frequency: QUARTERLY
5. No. of Issues Published Annually: 375,456
6. Annual Subscription Price: $15 domestic & APO; $18.75 foreign
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: Commandant, ATTN: ATSS-CJ, Editor, USASMA, 11291 Sgt. E. Churchill St., Ft. Bliss (El Paso), El Paso County, Texas, 79918-8002
8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same as 7
9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do Not Leave Blank)
Publisher (Name and Complete Mailing Address): Same as 7
Editor (Name and Complete Mailing Address): Position vacant
Managing Editor (Name and Complete Mailing Address): James A. Collins/same as 7

10. Owner

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy (USASMA)	Same as 7

11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check here. ☐ None

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
NA	

12. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes: (Check one)
☒ Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months
☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (If changed, publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

13. Publication Name: THE NCO JOURNAL
14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: Winter 95-96

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	93,916	88,954
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales (Not Mailed)	91,771	86,766
(2) Paid or Requested Mail Subscriptions (Include Advertisers' Proof Copies/Exchange Copies)	100	138
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b(1) and 15b(2))	91,871	86,904
d. Free Distribution by Mail (Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free)	45	50
e. Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or Other Means)	0	0
f. Total Free Distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e)	45	50
g. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15f)	91,916	86,954
h. Copies Not Distributed (1) Office Use, Leftovers, Spoiled	2,000	2,000
(2) Return from News Agents	NA	NA
i. Total (Sum of 15g, 15h(1), and 15h(2))	93,916	88,954
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c / 15g x 100)	100%	100%

16. This Statement of Ownership will be printed in the Winter 95-96 issue of this publication. ☐ Check box if not required to publish.

17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: James A. Collins, ME — Date: 27 SEP 95

[illegible]